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Letter from the editor

## Is Kalima Project a New Arab Think Tank/ Intellectual Hub?

As we were working on this our second special issue on translation, *Arab world English Journal* (AWEJ) received two invitations related directly to the theme of translation. Dr. Ali Bin Tamim, Secretary General of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award and Director of Kalima Project invited us to attend the ceremony of Sheikh Zayed Book Award and Abu Dhabi 2nd International Translation Conference on 25-28 April 2013. On her part Dr. Issy Yuliasri, Chair of the English Department at Semarang State University, Indonesia similarly invited us to attend the regional workshop of International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) on 25 - 27 March 2013. We would like to seize this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to both of our dear colleagues for their generous invitations. As the review process was already underway for the forthcoming issue of AWEJ, we were not able to consider papers to these two conferences for this special edition. We hope to publish some in later editions.

Historically, Arabs have paid a special and considerable attention to the challenges of translation. There are many eras in the Arab history which have witnessed a flourishing in the art of translation. We would like to mention two of the translation centers which made major contributions to the cross-cultural and linguistic challenges of translating between Arab and non Arab civilizations.

The first one is the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah or Dar Al Hikmah in Arabic) a famous translation institute and research center established in Abbasid era (Baghdad, Iraq). It was first established by Abbasid caliph Al Ma'mun (786 – 833) and was responsible for translating many Greek classics and others into Arabic. Bayt al-Hikmah attracted scholars from all over the world, and from many cultures and religions.

The second center is the School of Translators of Toledo (12th and 13th centuries) involving the group of scholars who worked together in Toledo (Spain) to translate many of the philosophical and scientific works from Arabic and Greek amongst other classic languages. The School played a significance role in the transfer of knowledge from Greek and Arabic and vice versa. Some

selected Arabic literature was translated into Latin. This was besides a huge number of classical works of ancient authors translated into Arabic. The Toledo school attracted and gathered scholars from around the world especially Europe regardless of race, religion and nationality.

Historians and researchers consider Dar Al Hikmah and School of Translators of Toledo as 'think tanks' of their time contributing much to the scientific advancement and growth of knowledge in the humanities around the world. In the last few decades we have noted many attempts by different official institutes, ministries, universities research centers, organizations, publishers and even individuals in several Arab courtiers, to launch translation projects, programs, or centers. None of these efforts has reached the level of the above mentioned two “giant” projects, and we are not yet in a position to account or evaluate these attempts. However, a special mention may be made to the Abu Dhabi project.

The Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi) has revealed some statistics about their project. They show that Kilama has translated 218 selected books in literature, 163 books under the category of children and youngsters, 54 in the social sciences and many other books in various categories. It has translated into Arabic more than 770 books in literature and across the different fields of science from 13 languages. Kalima is a project which aims at reviving the art of translation across the world. Kalima translates and publishes more than 100 selected books in Arabic each year.

During the Second International Translation Conference, Kalima has brought the translation theories into practice by organizing four workshops lasting for two days and followed by panel discussions by experts, participants, audience of interest and even mass media representatives. Sixty professional translators and languages academic experts from twenty countries participated in the Conference. It was really a unique new experience in which the experts shared their feedback of the two days workshops with participants, audiences and the media to draw out commendations in public for the upcoming conference. Most of the audience got the clear message that the leaders of the Kalima project are ready and open to collaboration. This was well received by our colleagues. To sum up, we could say that when Abu Dhabi launched its ambition project Kilama, it has in effect helped to undermine barriers of fears which have often been associated with the concept of translation in the Arab world the past few centuries. This is a unique and ambitious cultural project which has attracted many Arab and international intellectuals. The remain questions are: is Kilama project a new Arab “think tank” or an intellectual hub in our digital age? Could we compare it with Dar Al-Hikma and school of Toledo for Translation? The coming years will provide an answer.

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